Norma Jean

I awake to the sizzle of cooking meat at my preferred time - 9:30pm. Sleepshut and foul of temper, as is usual and has been for over a decade. Reintegration of waking conditions upon system boot in order to continue work.

Growling and complaining wordlessly, the few steps necessary to traverse the space between my couch in the corner and the sliding glass doors exiting to our compartment's third story balcony get staggered, cold-brewed coffee with heavy organic whipping cream from previous still cold in the aluminum receptacle and unlit cigarette - a cheap one, not my preferred brand - perched ready to fire in lips.

Minutes pass. The neighbors on the ground floor across the courtyard - a span of empty concrete skater pools that housed a population of well-fed ducks in times long gone - are greeting the Friday evening the way active participants in a thriving community must in order to maintain functioning status quo: door open, speakers of a department store brand bookshelf stereo broadcasting an FM radio station's live DJ set. Brick House. Every Breath You Take at a slightly faster BPM to make the transition smoother.

The door stubbornly lurches in halting cadence ajar, being as it is no longer sitting in a squared off track planed perfectly half a century ago, the same time the now painted over hand scraped ceiling beams were nailed or screwed in place.

Joe outstretches a hand holding a saucer-sized plate atop of which a thin cut of T-bone is resting alongside a knife and fork.

'Hey, 'man. Virginia can't chew this properly. You hungry?'

'I can eat. Thanks, yo.'

Extinguishing my unfinished Lucky Strike, which my mind insists cannot possibly be the same formula blend our great grandparents fought WWII with in their pockets with brass capped trench lighters alongside, I balance the surface on my squeezed together knees. Not enough moments later, after meticulously chewing fat and gnawing bone, my surer of step feet pace towards the single bedroom door. Knocking, I announce the storyteller has two tales to unload.

First off, an expression of gratitude and observation earned from experience.

For over a year Joe has been the most likely of the constantly rotating cast that peoples our late night network situational comedy to prepare assembled crowd size foodstuffs.

(Taptaptapping this out in my Blacknote app (a textpad for fans of metal from Norway!) on the aforementioned lofty perch, the second feline acquisition of the leaseholder slams headfirst full speed from a running start across the living area into the dirty but still transparent enough to be a window glass door beside me, rattling the heavy plate in its frame more than once. The persons who anthropomorphically talk to these creatures insist on calling this one Fluffy. Firsthand observation of its behavior insists I call it by a much longer but more accurate title - Next To Be Carried Aloft Towards The Horizon Wrigging And Shrieking By The Winged Talons Of A Large Raptor Directly Descended From Dinosaurs Like Its Cousin The Crocodile Because It Insisted On Darting Between Ankles Out Of Its Comfortable Air Conditioned Homespace Where Food And Constantly Flowing Water From A Plastic Fountain Purchased From A Pet Supplies Market Are. Shaking its head, it immediately leaps and claws a slat from its mooring clip of the vertical blinds and begins chewing the edge. A line from one of George Carlin's acts floats brainward: Let's beat the fuck out of Fluffy!)

It is a life's passion for him - one of the self-directed courses actual individuals, as opposed to soulless copies of hollow clones, can choose to consume their limited time spent alive willingly. Eating is an activity that, like taking a shit, inevitably gets assigned a percentage on the pie chart calculated upon one's death. Culinary curiosity leading to perfection of the craft is an art form more easily recognized as having broad societal value than a doctorate in baroque madrigals.

Joe's preparation for us in group has a message waiting for me alone embedded between the sinews. Nostalgic flood far from that feigned by chain restaurants by decorating the walls with rusting antiques. An evocation that masterful cookery hath wrought.

Related: an event in past tense. An assemblage of a different group with different ties binding the components.

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Priscilla and I are meeting one of her westside dealers for her preferred goods - heroin and cocaine, often sold together in this area in prepackaged units of ten dollars each. The proprietors of these independent businesses almost universally use long, skinny party balloons filled with a personal dose amount and then wrapped over themselves several times. The police on this side of the city are often quite abusive in their tactics to meet quota, not asking questions or identifying themselves before grabbing random people they suspect might be junkies off the sidewalk by their throats in an effort to keep their targets of abuse from being able to swallow the waterproof containers they purchased their products in. They are able to get away with this behavior because they rightly assume their quarry is too poor and too frightened of retribution by those who feel they are above the law to fight back with lawyers in court.

Today we are inside an eatery off of Culebra by the University of the Incarnate Word, the sort of restaurant that foodies hope to be ushered to by their guides when touring cities. The building is at the end of a residential street, converted from a multi-bedroom house. The source of the ingredients is the most local one could ever hope to ask for: eggs, chicken, goat, milk and more from backyards on the same avenue. It would be at this location, at a different date, that I would be engaged in a conversation with one of the waitresses on smoke break during which she related the interesting fact that when goats are slaughtered, they are hung upside down

with their throats slit. 'They sound like human babies' were her exact words. I would later use this phrase to title one of the tracks that would later appear on one of my five album releases - the first time I made an artwork that was all me, my voice, and not an imitation of my influences. It is a manipulated sample of a kick drum repeating while cuts I made and cleaned up from one of more than five hundred cassette recordings available free on the FBI website made by Jim Jones and the parishioners of the People's Temple.

Marilyn Monroe was popular amongst a certain generation for more reasons than her acting abilities. The rise from near poverty to risque stardom with even presidential ties spoke to a disenfranchised class who had previously far less visible heroes in the culture broadcast by far fewer sources than we have today. Upon first meeting the woman we were there to see, she smiled conspiratorially at the guy who her customer had brought with her, he recognizing immediately the origin of the names bestowed upon her by her parents. I would receive the same look from my dearest Patty when she first related her two daughters' names: Brittany and Kylie, obviously, I pointed out, the progeny of a woman whose favorite genre of music was pop. No one had recognized that before, and I suspect Norma Jean may have had the same experience.

Like Michelle Massey, who I wrote about a few days ago, it is impossible that either of these women have aged a day in twenty-five and fifteen years respectively. Some beauty is timeless and classic and never-ending. Living in the same city, though there are millions of us, I still have a notion that I could find myself standing in line behind Norma at a grocer's. No longer being attached to the eternal blonde head all-state cheerleader, the circumstances would be much more convivial in nature.

We are spaced out around the packed table she is sitting at, in a dining room with every seat filled at a time not considered by most service industry locations as a lunch rush. I hear Prissy tell her associate that Dairy Queen has excellent tacos. I

want to take take a giant step away from her reflexively, but I can't - there isn't room. Norma looks up immediately from her plate, not to address the speaker, but to stare directly at me trying to find a place to stand farther away from this blasphemy. Smiling again, she is gorgeous, and will always remain so, not even thinking she has been appreciated as such. Those who are need not waste thoughts on these matters.

A year or so later, I meet her in apartment parking lot without my significant other. She is also without chaperone, and herself waiting for someone who lives there to show and unlock their door. When I return to our home in Cibolo, Prissy wonders aloud what took me so long. Nothing, I reply, being honest. Straight there and back.

Conversation with few comes easy. Only those who are shining, in the Stephen King sense of the term, stand out. What I wouldn't give, if my reader pardons the cliche, to be face to face with Norma Jean even one more time, to note and update and behold the pinnacle of humankind that she made herself into. What statues hope to be inspired from. In a world with billions of no ones, it is so rare to be in the presence of The Real Thing. Her parents knew what they were doing.